

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Meditating on God's Circumstance- Defying Covenant Faithfulness in Christ

Bible Conference

1-2 November 2013

Hosted by

Grace Christian Fellowship

www.gcfonline.org

and Christ The Redeemer Church

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OVERVIEW OF THE THREE SESSIONS

Talk 1 (Friday evening):-

The **Gospel Focus** of the Book of Psalms: Introduction and Overview of Books I-III (Pss 1-89)

Talk 2 (Saturday morning):-

The **Gospel Heart** of the Book of Psalms: Book IV (Pss 90-106)

Talk 3 (Saturday morning):-

The **Gospel Climax** of the Book of Psalms: Book V and Conclusion (Pss 107-150)

INTRO (1-2)	BOOK I (3-41)	BOOK II (42-72)	BOOK III (73-89)	BOOK IV (90-106)	BOOK V (107-144/145)	CONCL (145/146-150)
Session 1	Session 1	Session 1	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 3

Introductory material: Optional Bible study for those wishing to interact with some of the data underlying the shape of the Psalter

APPROACHING THE PSALTER AS A BOOK

1. Look up Luke 24:44, Ephesians 5:18-19, Colossians 3:16.¹ Summarise what these references tell us about the significance of the Book of Psalms.
2. The Book of Psalms (or “Psalter”) is divided into five books. Look up the following references to see how the first four books finish: 41:13, 72:18-19, 89:52, 106:48. What do these four conclusions have in common?
3. In the light of your answer to question 2, where do you think the conclusion to Book Five (and the whole Psalter) begins?
4. Have a quick read of Psalms 1-2 (often considered to be the introduction to the Psalter). According to the beginning of Psalm 1 and the end of Psalm 2, what does it mean to be ‘blessed’?
5. There is a change of tone from Psalm 3 onwards. How would you express the difference between the tone of Psalms 3-7 and that found at the conclusion of the Psalter? What else do these early psalms have in common, according to their titles?
6. How should 72:20 shape our understanding of the Psalter? How might this verse be squared with, say, the title of Psalm 86?
7. The Psalter exhibits varying presentations or combinations of similar material. Note, for example, the following cases, and suggesting how they inform our understanding of the nature of the Psalter:
 - (a) Have a quick scan of 1 Chronicles 16:7-36, and observe how this comprises parts of what we know as Psalms 96, 105 and 106.
 - (b) Compare and contrast Psalms 14 and 53.
 - (c) Compare and contrast Psalms 108 and 60/57.
8. There are several groups of psalms that stand out. By what criteria have the following groups been arranged? 146-150, 120-134, 93-100. If you have time, see also the links in the following pairs/groups: 9-10, 20-21, 38-39, 42-43, 46-48, 50-51, 56-57, 111-112, 104-106.

¹ It is recognised that the Ephesians & Colossians references do not speak exclusively of the Psalms of the OT.

9. What kind of information is supplied by the titles of the psalms in Book II? How does this differ from the openings/titles of the psalms in Books IV and V (as you have already partly noted in answer to question 8)? [Bear in mind that the title is in fact simply the opening verse of the psalm in the original, being neither set apart from the psalm itself nor given a different font size!]
10. How important is chronology (or the order of historical events) in the order of the Psalms in Book II, according to the information in the titles and what you know from the historical background in 1-2 Samuel? Does your answer add anything to your understanding of how the Psalter has been shaped?
11. What stage in Israel's history is the earliest at which the Psalter could have reached its final form? Take account of the following data: Pss 107:3; 137; 147:2. To what extent do we need to take account of the original recipients of the Psalter as we interpret this Book in a way that is sensitive to its final form?
12. The Psalter is the most frequently-quoted OT book in the NT. How is the Psalter used in the NT, according to Hebrews 1 and Romans 3? To what extent does this challenge the way in which you have tended to handle the psalms?
13. Which of these statements is the *least* defective, according to what you have seen in this study?
- (a) *The individual psalms have been cut off from their original historical settings and have been put together with other psalms according to criteria other than history. Therefore re-establishing the original historical context of a given psalm is of only minimal significance in the process of interpretation.*
- (b) *The psalm-titles provide us with much historical information, both in their titles and (less directly) within their main body. As with any other OT book, it's essential that we work hard to reconstruct the historical setting that lies behind a given psalm.*
- (c) *The psalms all speak of Christ and present us with timeless truths. Both the framework of the Psalter and the NT point to the fact that the historical background has now been transcended for us Christian believers. Hence the original historical setting lying behind a given psalm is no longer relevant.*

The “bottom line” of these data is this: we need to understand the Book of Psalms as being more *fundamentally* “God’s word to us” than “our words to God”. This does *not*, however, mean that we should not benefit from individual psalms in our prayer lives. We *can*, as it were, step into the psalmists’ shoes and appropriate their words as we speak to God. It’s a case of “both-and”, not “either-or”.

- **Why? What principles of sound Bible-handling provide for the practice of taking the psalms on to our lips?**
- **As we do so, what dangers should we be alert to?**
- **What are the differences between “context” in the Book of Psalms and context in, say, Mark or Romans?**

SESSION 1

The **Gospel Focus** of the Book of Psalms

PART 1

INTRODUCTION (PSALMS 1-2)

1. “Bible-Overview Dynamic”

Lk 24:32: ‘Did not our hearts burn within us...?’

*God’s story told in God’s way: progressive revelation

- Tension
- Transparency
- Typology

*Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ whose consummation lies in a new cosmos

*Mindsets reconfigured by the Holy Spirit

2. The Key Ideas of Psalm 2

Verses 1-3:

Verses 4-6:

Verses 7-9:

Verses 10-12:

3. Psalm 2 as Gospel

A King on a par with God Himself (cf. Jn 5:23)

Acts 13,32-33:

The *gospel* (Rom 1:3-4, 2 Tim 2:8)!

The connection between Ps 2:7 and Ps 2:8-9 (cf. Acts 17:31)

4. The Flow of Psalm 2 and its Application to Us

5. The Key Ideas of Psalm 1

One-sentence summary of Psalm 1

6. How Psalms 1-2 Function as the Psalter's Introduction

'Law'?

Book-ends ('blessed') and vocabulary links between Pss 1-2

THE PERSPECTIVE OF PSALM 1:
How to be blessed/wise

Meditate on the LORD's instruction



Avoid the way of perishing

THE PERSPECTIVE OF PSALM 2:
How to be blessed/wise

Serve the LORD, kiss the Son, take
refuge in the Son



Avoid the way of perishing

=

THE PERSPECTIVE OF PSALM 1:
How to be blessed/wise

Meditate on the LORD's instruction



Avoid the way of perishing

THE PERSPECTIVE OF PSALM 2:
How to be blessed/wise

YHWH's Son is supreme – the owner
and judge of the nations



Serve the LORD, kiss the Son, take
refuge in the Son



Avoid the way of perishing

→

=

Psalm 1 portrays the blessed person who meditates on God's instruction day and night; Psalm 2 shows us the content of that instruction – the fact that God's king is supreme and will judge the world.

7. The Psalter as a Carefully-Crafted Book

- Numerous links between adjacent psalms
- Several groups of psalms
- Five Books, each ending in a flourish of praise (or “doxology”)
- Introduction & conclusion
- Themes of Psalms 1-2 recur at seams between Books

INTRO (1-2)	BOOK I (3-41)	BOOK II (42-72)	BOOK III (73-89)	BOOK IV (90-106)	BOOK V (107-144/145)	CONCL (145/146-150)
W R/C		R/C	W R/C	(W) R/C	(W) R/C	

- Editorial note at 72:20

8. The Psalter as the Story of Joseph's Meditating on Psalm 2

Our era lies between the time of the fulfilment of 2:7 (the resurrection) and the time of the fulfilment of 2:8-9 (the judgment)...

...but the Book was first addressed to Israelites living in between the return from Exile and the first coming of Jesus

PSALMS 1 & 2: LINKS AT THE LEVEL OF VOCABULARY

Psalm 1:1 **O the happiness of** that one, who Hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked. And in the **way** of sinners hath not stood, And in the seat of scorners hath not **sat**; 2 But -- in the law of Jehovah *is* his delight, And in His law he doth **meditate** by day and by night: 3 And he hath been as a tree, Planted by rivulets of water, That giveth its fruit in its season, And its leaf doth not wither, And all that he doth he causeth to prosper. 4 Not so the wicked: But -- as chaff that wind driveth away! 5 Therefore the wicked rise not in **judgment**, Nor sinners in the company of the righteous, 6 For Jehovah is knowing the **way** of the righteous, And the **way** of the wicked **is lost**!

Psalm 2:1 Why have nations tumultuously assembled? And do peoples **meditate** vanity? 2 Station themselves do kings of the earth, And princes have been united together, Against Jehovah, and against His Messiah: 3 'Let us draw off Their cords, And cast from us Their thick bands.' 4 He who **is sitting** in the heavens doth laugh, The Lord doth mock at them. 5 Then doth He speak unto them in His anger, And in His wrath He doth trouble them: 6 'And I -- I have anointed My King, Upon Zion -- My holy hill.' 7 I declare concerning a statute: Jehovah said unto me, 'My Son Thou *art*, I to-day have brought thee forth. 8 Ask of Me and I give nations -- thy inheritance, And thy possession -- the ends of earth. 9 Thou dost rule them with a sceptre of iron, As a vessel of a potter Thou dost crush them.' 10 And now, O kings, act wisely, Be instructed, O **judges** of earth, 11 Serve ye Jehovah with fear, And rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Chosen One, lest He be angry, And ye **lose the way**, When His anger burneth but a little, **O the happiness of** all trusting in Him!

[Young's Literal Translation]

SESSION 1

The Gospel Focus of the Book of Psalms

PART 2

OVERVIEW OF BOOK I (PSALMS 3-41), BOOK II (PSALMS 42-72) AND BOOK III (PSALMS 73-89)

1. The Importance of the Packaging...

Ps 72,20

Indicators of Form in Book I

See Supplement

2. The Content of Book I

A rough overall guide

Pss 3-14: the problem of enemies

Pss 15-24: the exemplary and victorious king

Pss 25-34: the king pardoned and delivered

Pss 35-41: the problems of enemies, sin and sickness

Pss 3-14	ENEMIES		
Pss 25-34	ENEMIES	SIN	
Pss 35-41	ENEMIES	SIN	SICKNESS

Start of Book (Ps 3):

End of Book (Ps 41):

Big idea 1: David is exemplary and victorious

- David as righteous
 - Ps 15
 - Ps 24:3-6
 - Ps 19:7-14
 - Ps 18:20-24
 - Ps 23:6
- David as triumphant over enemies
 - Ps 18 title
 - Ps 18:37-50
 - Pss 20-21

Big idea 2: David is an embattled sinner

THIS IS THE DOMINANT NOTE OF BOOK I!

How does Psalm 3 highlight the fact that David is NOT the king of Psalm 2?

- David facing enemy opposition
 - Pss 3-14
- David facing up to enemies *and* his sinfulness
 - Ps 25:11, 18
 - Pss 32-33 (sins forgiven)
- David facing up to enemies *and* sin *and* sickness
 - Ps 38:1-5, 18
 - Ps 39:1, 8
 - Ps 40:12
 - Ps 41:3-4

3. Joseph's Meditating at the End of Book I

Two camera angles/portraits – like and unlike the Ps 2 king

4. Book II as Recapitulation of Book I

Another David book

Some written by David's musicians

Don't forget 72:20

Many titles refer to particular historical incidents

Compare and contrast Psalm 40:13-17 with Psalm 70.
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David again

→ not established as God's king on Zion, God's holy hill (Pss 46-48)

→ beleaguered by his enemies and troubled by his sins (Pss 51-64)

5. Book II Distinctives relative to Book I

(1) A wider gap between David and Ps 2

First psalm of David (51): murderer, adulterer

Last psalm of David² (71): at the end of his life

In between (check the titles!):

(2) Eyes now on Solomon

- The problem: spiritual depression and enemy oppression at both individual and national levels (Pss 42-44)
- The solution: 42:8, 44:26 (God's loving covenant commitment – background in 2 Samuel 7 [also Psalm 2])
- The solution writ large at the beginning and end of the rest of the Book (Pss 45, 72 – the figure of *Solomon*)

² See supplementary notes re relationship between Psalm 70 ('Of David') and Psalm 71.

(3)

Compare and contrast the flourish of praise (or “doxology”) at the end of Book I with the flourish of praise at the end of Book II. Ps 41:13 and Ps 72:18-19.

NB NB NB! *According to Ps 72, the Abrahamic covenant will find its fulfilment in the king of Ps 2...*

6. Joseph’s Meditating at the End of Book II (and Ours)

David’s son to be THE Son

Rom 15:4

7. The Boundaries of Book III: Crisis, Near-despair and Calling into Question of Psalms 1-2

First half of Ps 73: Ps 1 called into question

An individual’s crisis

180° shift: negative → positive

Second half of Ps 89: Ps 2 called into question

180° shift: positive → negative (turning-point verse 38)

God almost accused of covenant *disloyalty*: what has happened to the promises of 2 Samuel 7?

National catastrophe (Exile)

Adjacent psalms (Pss 74, 88) outstandingly gloomy

Ps 88 the blackest psalm (one individual)

Ps 74 one of the blackest psalms (perspective of nation)

Background of Exile (though not every psalm)

8. The Middle of Book III

(1) More of that desperate pleading

Ps 77:7-9

Ps 79:5

Ps 80:4

Ps 85:5

What has happened to God's loving covenant commitment?

(2) Clues as to why the Exile has occurred

Ps 78:5-10

Ps 81:8-16

The Sinai covenant was conditional on obedience!

(3) Some shafts of light

Ps 86 a psalm 'of David'?! And affirmation of God's covenant loyalty (verses 5, 15)

Optimism in relation to temple (Ps 84), land (Ps 85), king (Ps 86), city (Ps 87)?

Gentiles as citizens of God's city (Ps 87)?!

And the flourish of praise that closes the Book is there (just...) (Ps 89:52)

9. Joseph's Meditating on Book III

KEY INDICATORS OF FORM IN BOOK I

Every psalm ‘of David’

Psalms 10 and 33 are only *apparent* exceptions: these two psalms are closely tied to their predecessors (see ESV footnote 6, p. 540; and compare the last verse of Psalm 32 with the first verse of Psalm 33).

Psalms 15 and 24 as “book-ends”

Compare the question of Ps 15:1 with that of Ps 24:3: who is righteous enough for God? It is widely recognised amongst scholars – and the case is strong – that there is a “concentric structure” across the group of psalms delineated by this question. Ps 15//Ps 24; Ps 16//Ps 23; Ps 17//Ps 22; Ps 18//Pss 20-21 (the latter two are “twin” psalms); Ps 19 stands out in the middle of the structure.

Psalms 25 and 34 as “book-ends”

These are alphabetic acrostics – in the original, the lines begin with the successive letters of the alphabet. Your Bible probably helpfully points out where you have acrostic psalms by giving you a footnote to that effect. There are a couple of other acrostics in Book I, but what’s striking about these two in particular is that they exhibit a number of characteristics in common – they both leave out the sixth letter of the alphabet; they both add on an extra line after the end of the alphabet, and the first letter of that extra line is the same... There are too many “coincidences” there for us to be able to dismiss them! Irregularities can occur in acrostics, but (according to a maths expert I consulted), there’s only a 1 in 2000 chance that you’d find that combination of irregularities “as a matter of course” in adjacent acrostics within the Psalter. Add to that the fact that the verb in the supplementary line of each of the psalms is the same (the verb ‘redeem’)...

Also, in Book II: psalms without titles closely tied to preceding psalms

Pss 42-43 and Pss 70-71. Check these out for yourself: what refrain binds Psalm 43 to Psalm 42, and what refrain binds Psalm 71 to Psalm 70?

SESSION 2

The **Gospel Heart** of the Book of Psalms

BOOK IV (PSALMS 90-106)

1. The Story So Far...

Looking back over Israel's history: David...Solomon...Exile...

What hope could remain once the Exile has happened?

Transition to Books IV-V: what do you observe regarding the headings in these last two Books?

2. Introduction to Book IV: The Moses Book

- Prayer of Moses (Ps 90)
- Name 'Moses'
- Moses' day
- Books of Moses

3. Studying the Boundaries: Psalm 90 and Psalms 104-106

Ps 90:1-12: recalling the problem of Genesis 3

The problems of human sin and God's wrath

Ps 106: Israel's sin & God's judgment according to Exodus/Numbers

E.g. vv. 19-23 (Ex 32)

E.g. vv. 24-27 (Num 13-14)

E.g. vv. 28-31 (Num 25)

Ps 90:12-17: Moses acts as mediator

Plea for vv. 1-11 to be reversed

Links between Ps 89 and Ps 90 enable us to understand that *the problem of the exile needs to be understood through the lens of the Genesis 3 problem*

Plea grounded in God's loving covenant commitment

God's loving covenant commitment has always stood firm

Ps 104:5-9: covenant with Noah

Ps 105: covenant with Abraham

Ps 106: covenant with Abraham unshakeable *even in the face of Israel's sin*

- Because God has never totally wiped out his people (even in Exile, v. 47)
- Despite 1000 years of *persistent sin*
- TRUE, Ps 106 presents the same sin-and-wrath problem as Ps 90, ...YET... it celebrates God's covenant loyalty just like Ps 105
- The Exile doesn't threaten the covenant with Abraham: it was foreseen in the Books of Moses (Lev 26:42-45, Deut 4:25-31, Deut 30:1-10)
- God raised up mediators (Moses, Phinehas) in order to keep the Abrahamic promises alive – e.g. 106:19-23 (cf. Ex 32: Moses pleads on basis of Abrahamic promises)

4. Joseph's Meditating on Book IV (and the Middle of the Book)

Joseph reassured that God is still committed to Abrahamic covenant

Question 1: but what about the covenant with David?

Question 2: but is God really powerful enough?

Pss 93-100:.....

Observations regarding the beginning of these psalms?

NB Exodus/Sinai language, e.g. 97:1-6, 98:1-3

How does Psalm 99 tie in with what we have seen at the boundaries of Book IV (Psalms 90, 105-106)?

Question 3: but don't we need a solution to the problem of sin?

Wait till Book V!

Ps 101: blameless king (vv. 2, 4)

Ps 102: afflicted one who suffers God's wrath (title, vv. 9-11)
→ Zion to be rebuilt, nations to be gathered (vv. 13-24)

5. Conclusion (Ps 103³): Total Assurance of God's Covenant Loyalty

The Answer to the Ps 90 Prayer

- Ps 90 Moses as mediator // 103:7-8: Moses as mediator (Ex 32-34)
- 90:13-14 pity, satisfaction with covenant loyalty // 103:4-5 mercy, covenant loyalty, satisfaction
- 90:3,5 humans as dust, like grass that flourishes only briefly, days few // 103:14-15 humans as dust, days like grass, flourish only briefly
- 90:7-11 God's anger at sin // 103:9-10 God who does not harbour anger for ever, nor treat his people as their sins deserve
- 90:2 God from everlasting to everlasting // 103:17 God's covenant loyalty from everlasting to everlasting

No more questioning of God's covenant commitment!

³ Psalms 91 and 92 also set forth the psalmists' confidence in God's faithfulness. See, respectively, verse 4 and verse 2.

SESSION 3

The **Gospel Climax** of the Book of Psalms

BOOK V (PSALMS 107-144/145) AND CONCLUSION (PSALMS 145/146-150)

Please study this page before the session begins

THE STRUCTURE OF BOOK V

Book V contains several clear groups of psalms and a refrain:-

1 0 7	108-110	111-118	119	120-136 ⁴	(137) ⁵ 138-144	1 4 5	146-150
P 1	DAVID	P2 → <i>PI</i>		ASCENTS →PI	DAVID	6	P2

- “**PI**” (“praise type 1”) and the thick vertical lines indicate the junctures at which the refrain appears. In its full form the refrain reads as follows: ‘Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his loving covenant commitment endures for ever’; but in most of its occurrences it’s only the last part (‘for his loving covenant commitment endures for ever’) that’s quoted. The larger the “**PI**” print, the more the refrain is repeated! You can see that there’s a crescendo building up to the climax in Psalm 136 where the refrain appears in every verse.
- The other type of summons to praise, “P2” (“praise type 2”), is ‘Praise the LORD.’ Psalms 111-117 and 146-150 begin and/or end this way.⁷

⁴ To see why Psalms 135-136 have been tacked on to the Songs of Ascents, compare 134:1 with 135:1-2 and 135:8-12 with 136:10-22.

⁵ Psalm 137 is transitional: it is not a psalm of David, but it serves as a fitting opening to this David sequence.

⁶ Ps 145 is also a psalm of David, concluding the preceding group and introducing the flourish of praise with which the Psalter closes. Remarkably, it is the only psalm which is designated as (literally) ‘praise’...and yet the traditional title of the whole Psalter in Hebrew is ‘Book of Praises’. In the light of what we have seen this weekend, what do you make of this discrepancy?

⁷ With the exception of Psalm 114, although ‘Praise the LORD’ is found at the beginning of this psalm in the Greek version of the OT.

1. Background of Books III-IV

The desperate cry of Ps 89 is not in vain!

Abrahamic promises still on track, which means the Ps 2 king is coming

Moses' mediation was only ever partial & temporary

A radical solution to the sin problem is required; Moses & Phinehas kept only *some* of God's wrath away – and only in the *short term*

2. The Heartbeat of Book V: 'for his covenant loyalty endures for ever'

Refrain gets louder in a Book that is ringing with praise

3. The Theme of Book V: The Return of the Exiles (Psalm 107)

Historical setting of Book: return from Exile

Ps 107:2-3; Pss 120-136; Ps 137; Ps 147:2

Ps 106:47 prayer answered in Ps 107:1-3

Return portrayed in Book V far outstrips the historical reality

In what ways does Psalm 107 depict the return from Exile?

Themes of Ps 107 recur in rest of Book V

E.g.

113: a reversal of the fortunes of the poor

114, 135-136: a new exodus

116: deliverance from death

118, 120-122 (120-134): a journey to Zion

130: forgiveness of sins

4. The Climactic Psalms of Book V: The Psalm 2 King!

First climax: Ps 110

- Supreme king on Zion
- David's lord
- Permanent mediator

Second climax: Ps 118

- *Rejected* stone
- Comes in name of the LORD

The New David of Book V is "ratcheted up" relative to David of Book II – Ps 57 is reworked in the direction of enhanced victory (Ps 108) and is picked up in the context of enhanced suffering (Ps 142)

Note the little Ps 117 along the way: covenant loyalty for *all* nations!

Third climax: Ps 132

- 'Horn' for David to be set on Zion
- Fulfilment of covenant with David

Fourth climax: Ps 144

- Servant David wins victory
- No further exile
- People showered with blessings

- Double 'blessed' (v. 15): book-end with Pss 1-2?

5. The Realism of Life in the Meantime (Psalm 119)

The journey of Pss 120-134 is tough

Scoffers/enemies/persecutors also on view in Ps 119 (e.g., vv. 81-88)

Resources for the journey supplied by Scripture

Meditation on, and delight in, God's word (cf. Ps 1), e.g. vv. 97, 72, 103

Our context is not so different

We have the privilege of more revelation

Sin problem dealt with

Ps 2:7 fulfilled at the resurrection

Ps 2:8-9 (judgment) yet to be fulfilled

We have come to heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:18-24), but we seek the city that is to come (Heb 13:14)

In the meantime, God's word is sufficient to sustain us: we are to keep meditating on the gospel of Ps 2!

6. The Concluding Flourish of Praise (Psalms 146-150)

Praise offered up by gathered people in Zion and by whole creation

Note Ps 148:14!

Supplementary questions

REFLECTING ON THE NEW-TESTAMENT USE OF THE PSALMS

☞ What proportion of quotations/allusions found in the NT are drawn from the Book of Psalms?

☞ New-Testament quotations of the Psalms are *not* evenly spread across the Psalter. Wherein lies the bias? What might this be telling us?

☞ In what main ways/contexts/connections are the psalms quoted in the New Testament? What is surprising or instructive here?

[Important pointers: (1) consider how the Gospels portray the sufferings of Christ; (2) consider how the superiority of Christ is demonstrated in Hebrews.]

THE VARIETY OF WAYS IN WHICH INDIVIDUAL PSALMS⁸ FIND THEIR FULFILMENT IN CHRIST

I. A variety of dangers

If we find it hard to work out how a given psalm speaks of Christ, this may be due, in part, to some combination of the following:

- (1) The danger of overvaluing the role of specific New-Testament controls.
- (2) The danger of overplaying either the continuity or the discontinuity between the two Testaments.
- (3) The danger of undervaluing the range of routes from the Psalms to Christ.

Let's unpack these dangers before setting forth something of the variety of ways in which individual psalms may be understood to be fulfilled in Christ.

- (1) **The danger of overvaluing the role of specific New-Testament controls.** Many of the psalms are quoted (or alluded to) in the New Testament. In their NT context, however, the quotations are rarely intended to expound the entire psalm in question; rather, they highlight a particular theological point that serves the NT author's purpose. Thus
 - Ps 24:1a ('The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it') is quoted in 1 Cor 10:26 in connection with the need not to cause others to stumble, but the question of not causing others to stumble hardly constitutes the heart and soul of Ps 24!
 - Ps 104 deals at length with God's creative/re-creative/providential activity, but the NT control in Heb 1:7 (Ps 104:4) is restricted to making the point that angels are inferior to Christ.
 - Ps 109:8b ('May another take his place of leadership') is quoted in Acts 1:20 with reference to Judas. Why should we imagine that this quotation unlocks the Christian meaning of the entire psalm? Is it likely that the long Ps 109, read through Christian spectacles, speaks of covenant curses being called down exclusively on Judas?
 - Ps 110 is quoted several times in the NT, and it is clear that none of these NT quotations (taken on its own) opens up the Christian meaning of the entire psalm. The quotation of verse 1 ('The LORD said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"') serves to demonstrate that Jesus is greater than David in Mark 12 and that he is divine and supreme in Hebrews 1; verse 4 ('The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek"') is taken up later in Hebrews to make a fresh point relating to Jesus' perfect priesthood.

⁸ As opposed to the Psalter as a whole.

(2) **The danger of overplaying either the continuity or the discontinuity between the two Testaments.** If we handle an OT passage in such a way as to suggest that the NT era has not yet arrived (as if, in other words, there is complete continuity between the two Testaments), the chances are we are astray. Even those psalms that delight in God's revelation (Pss 1, 19, 119) must be viewed through NT glasses: the Christian's 'law of the LORD' is not the same as the Jew's! Conversely, we need to avoid jumping directly to the NT. This is perhaps our greater danger. Have you ever read Ps 51 as if it's a Christian confession?! What did you do with the last two verses ('In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar')?! Again, we might have prayed verse 11 of the Ps 51 ('Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me') as if it is compatible with NT theology; yet the historical particularity of the text turns on the fact that the Spirit had been withdrawn from King Saul following his disobedience, a scenario that David, in his capacity as Saul's replacement (that is, as King) was anxious to avoid following his adultery with Bathsheba.

(3) **The danger of undervaluing the range of routes from the Psalms to Christ.** Every datum in the OT relates to Christ in some way or another (cf. Jn 5:39; Lk 24:27; Lk 24:44), but we need to be alert to the variety of ways in which it does so. Let's take note of Rom 3:19-21 in this regard:-

3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. 21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Verses 19-20 tell us (in the flow of 1:18ff.) that one of the functions of the Law/law⁹ is to highlight sin. In the immediate context, the Psalms are quoted several times to support the assertion that all have failed to keep the Law/law. This means that one major route from the Psalms to Christ (a neglected one, I suggest) is to point up our need of the gospel.

Verse 21 goes on to speak of that gospel solution. The other major route from the Psalms to Christ (the one we are more familiar with, perhaps) is mentioned in this verse, namely the fact that the Old Testament (referred to here as 'the Law and the Prophets') testifies to him as the solution. But even here, let's be sensitive to the variety of ways in which the Psalms set forth this gospel solution.

Indeed, it might be helpful to consider each of these broad ways of moving from the Psalms to Christ in relation to the two broad categories of club used by golfers – woods and irons. Each category has its own range of clubs, as we shall now see, and we should acknowledge up front that this classification is not intended to obscure the similarity between the various clubs in both categories, nor the fact

⁹ The Mosaic Law in the case of Jews, the law 'written on the heart' in the case of Gentiles; but for the purposes of Paul's argument in this context, they come to much the same thing.

that the best golfers use iron woods (i.e. the two broad categories are far from mutually exclusive)...

II. A variety of woods: our need of Christ

- (a) **Law → gospel.** During Session 2 we touched on the fact that the question posed by Ps 15 – who is fit for God? – is taken up by the flow of the psalms in that section of Book I. The answer given in both this Psalm and Ps 24 ('clean hands...pure heart...') is clearly demanding. The Christian reader is inevitably thrust forward to gaze at the life of the only human who matches the Law's demands.
- (b) **Old covenant → new covenant.** The element of conditionality in the Davidic covenant (Ps 132) needs to give way to a new covenant in which the bestowal of blessings is not conditional on the obedience of sinful human beings.
- (c) **Inadequate structures → sufficient sacrifice.** That God provided for the forgiveness of his people in Old-Testament times is not in doubt; but the sacrifices offered in the tabernacle did not in themselves secure this forgiveness. Ps 40:6 (cf. Heb 10:1-5: the blood of bulls and goats serve as a reminder of the sin problem and thus our need of Christ; the Lord Jesus carries out God's will through his self-sacrifice).

III. A variety of irons: Christ as gospel-solution

- (a) **Type → antitype.**
 - i. King David in Ps 101: a type of the blameless Christ.
 - ii. The exodus in Ps 114: a type of the real deliverance from sin, etc.
- (b) **Reverse type (/contrast) → antitype.**
 - i. Ps 49:7: no man can redeem the life of another...but Jesus can!
 - ii. Ps 80:12-16: a vine whose surrounding walls are broken, which is ravaged by the forest boar, which is burnt by fire and which is cut down...contrast Jesus as the new, true vine (Jn 15)!
 - iii. Ps 106: Moses and Phinehas act as mediators between God and the Israelites, but their intercession/intervention achieves only partial and temporary removal of God's wrath (cf. Session 4 – some people are put to death, and the next case of rebellion [giving rise to God's wrath] is only around the corner)...contrast Jesus' mediation which removes God's wrath for *all* God's people *definitively*.

- (c) **Analogy → fulfilment.** Jesus' use of Pss 42-43 language¹⁰ in the Garden of Gethsemane means that the whole scenario of the psalmist's suffering is evoked as we read Mk 14:34 (and parallels) and that Pss 42-43 are designed to help us understand what Jesus went through.
- (d) **Hyperbole → reality.**
- i. Ps 45:6 ('Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever...')¹¹: hyperbole with respect to the human figure, but not with respect to Christ.
 - ii. Ps 72:11 ('All kings will bow down to him'), 72:17 ('May his name endure for ever; may it continue as long as the sun').
- (e) **Salvation-historical flow → consummation in Christ.** Many psalms trace the plot-line of redemption for which we Christians have the full history with its climax in Christ.
- i. Ps 78 (history of Israel from Egypt to David).
 - ii. Pss 105-106 (Abraham to the exile).
- (f) **Thematic progressive revelation → fulfilment in Christ.** Several psalms play a role not only within the flow of the Psalter but also within the broader unfolding development of a biblical theme which finds its fulfilment in Christ.
- i. Theme of temple in Pss 84, 134.
 - ii. Theme of city in Pss 87, 137 (in Ps 87, for example, the accent falls on the fact that Gentiles are found to have their origin in Zion).

For further reading: Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*. Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999.

¹⁰ The Greek translation of Ps 42:5 is strikingly similar to Mk 14:34.

¹¹ It is possible that this is an example of what is sometimes referred to as 'sensus plenior' (fuller sense), i.e. it may be that the psalmist's use of 'god' is similar to that of Ps 82 (where the word refers to judges) but that in the light of the whole canon of Scripture it comes to take on a bigger meaning than the human author could have originally intended.

RESOURCES RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER STUDY OF THE PSALMS

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Grogan, Geoffrey, *Prayer, Praise & Prophecy: A Theology of the Psalms*. Mentor; Fearn: Christian Focus, 2001. A comprehensive handbook that is accessible to non-specialist readers, evangelical in outlook and sensitive to the big picture of the Psalter.

Kidner, Derek, *Psalms 1-72. An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary; Leicester: IVP, 1973. AND *Psalms 73-150. A commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms*. TOTC; Leicester: IVP, 1975. Probably still the best commentary available: combines outstanding scholarship (especially at the level of detail) with accessibility to non-specialist readers, succinctness and sensitivity to reading the Psalms through NT spectacles.

RECOMMENDED

Harman, Allan, *Commentary on the Psalms*. Mentor; Fearn: Christian Focus, 1998. Not quite in Kidner's league, but more sensitive than Kidner to the big picture of the Psalter. Brief, accessible, sensitive to covenant theology.

Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of the Psalms* (two volumes). Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, IVP, 2001. Certainly not in Kidner's league, but edifying and aims to grapple with the big picture of the Psalter.

Futato, Mark D, *Transformed by Praise: The Purpose and Message of the Psalms*. Phillipsburg [New Jersey]: P & R Publishing, 2002. A simple, edifying sweep through the big picture of the Psalter that takes a similar approach to ours this weekend.

Grogan, Geoffrey, *Psalms*. Two Horizons; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008. I've not yet used this commentary that much, but it looks accessible and seems to take account of others' insights in a helpful way.

MORE ADVANCED

Delitzsch, Franz, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (three volumes). London: Hodder, 1889/1894 (translation of fourth German edition, 1883). An outstanding technical commentary.

Dempster, Stephen, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. New Studies in Biblical Theology; Leicester/Downers Grove: Apollos/IVP, 2003, pp. 194-202 (section on the Psalms). A similar approach to the one we have taken this weekend.

REINFORCEMENT OF MATERIAL TAUGHT DURING THE WEEKEND

Hely Hutchinson, James, 'A New-Covenant Slogan in the Old Testament', in Jamie A. Grant, Alistair I. Wilson, eds., *The God of Covenant. Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives* (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 100-121.

-- 'Psalms', dans *NIV Proclamation Bible. Correctly Handling the Word of Truth* ({London}: Hodder & Stoughton, 2013), {p. }.

-- 'The Psalter as a Book', in Andrew G. Shead, ed., *Stirred by a Noble Theme. The Book of Psalms in the Life of the Church* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2013), 23-45.